TECHNOLOGY OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM
NARRATIVE
(revised 7-30-01)

The Legal Services Corporation of Iowa (LSCI) is applying for a Technology Opportunities Program Grant in partnership with the Iowa Association of Senior Centers (IASC), and with the support of the Iowa Department of Elder Affairs, the Iowa Association of Area Agencies on Aging (IAAA), and numerous area agencies on aging. The grant will fund the Iowa Senior Citizens Internet Access Network (ISCIAN), which will provide easily accessible Internet service, with appropriate training, at 85 senior centers in rural, low-income and minority communities throughout Iowa. The Internet access will enable older Iowans to receive the services and information they need to enhance their economic, physical and social well-being, to remain independent and to make better life planning decisions. It will also provide new opportunities for social interaction, community involvement and cultural enrichment.

PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to provide easily accessible Internet service at 85 senior centers to increase access to critical services by older Iowans, especially those living in Iowa's rural, low-income and minority communities where public access to Internet service does not exist or is not easily accessible. Much of Iowa is becoming a depopulated, aging and increasingly impoverished rural community. The rural areas have lost a large segment of their industrial/agricultural-based economy, which in turn has caused a flight of businesses, services, and population from small towns to Iowa's urban centers. Forty-eight of Iowa's 99 counties lost population during the 1990's, all but seven of which already had populations of less than 20,000 people. Other population shifts have left an inner core of impoverished neighborhoods in some urban communities in Iowa.

Iowa has a larger percentage (2%) than any other state of people who are 85 or older. It is fourth in the percentage (22%) of population over 60. In 35 rural Iowa counties, 17.5 - 20.4 % of the people are over 65. In an additional 20 counties, 20.5 - 24% of the people are 65 or older. Sixty-four percent of Iowans age 75 or over are women and 52.9% of these women live alone. Nationally, only 67% of people 65 or older have a high school education. Not surprisingly, the poorest counties in Iowa are also located in rural areas, with poverty rates that exceed 11% in 39 of Iowa's 99 counties, most of which are rural. Five rural counties in southern Iowa have poverty rates of 15.6 - 19.5%. Poverty rates increase dramatically with age. In 1998, the poverty rate for the 18-64 age group was 10.5%. It was 14.2% for people 85 or older.

Most public and human services in Iowa are concentrated in Iowa's larger cities. The rural-to-urban migration has left thousands of elderly people in rural towns with few readily available human services. Although many services may be accessed over the telephone, telephones do not allow for the transmission of documents that are often critical to receiving essential services. Telephones also do not allow for the efficient dissemination of written educational materials that are important to seniors. Telephone access is also viable only when seniors know that appropriate services exist. In its 24 years of providing services, LSCI has found that thousands of people are not aware that services are available to help them.

National research indicates there is a great electronic divide between urban-centered elders with sufficient income and the remainder of the older population. In Iowa's few growing urban areas, access to digital services, including Internet access, is both fast and increasingly inexpensive. Access to affordable digital technology drops precipitously as one moves into rural and low-income areas of Iowa. In parts of rural Iowa, toll-free Internet access is limited to one local provider. The Iowa Association of Senior Centers conducted a preliminary survey of senior centers in Iowa for the purposes of this application. The survey found that there were only a few senior centers in Iowa's urban areas that have Internet access for their clients, and that access to the Internet at rural senior centers is virtually non-existent. Most low-income or rural older Iowans do not know about human services web sites, or they cannot access the sites since they do not have access to computers. They remain isolated and ill-informed through no fault of their own.

As a result of their isolation, poverty, lack of knowledge about services and lack of affordable, easily-accessed Internet service, thousands of older Iowans do not know about or receive the services that are available to help them prevent or resolve their health care, housing, consumer, legal, safety, income and other problems.

The ISCIAN will provide easily accessible Internet service, with appropriate training, at 85 senior centers located primarily in rural, low-income and minority neighborhoods in Iowa, where public access to such service does not exist or is not easily accessible. This project will generate interest and obtain the support of prospective end users by making Internet access as simple as possible and by hiring and training people who know how to help elderly people who are computer illiterate overcome technology barriers.

A unique component of this project is that each computer will have desk top icons for most of the main providers of services to the elderly. The icons will give users one-button access to LSCI's Legal Hotline for Older Iowans, the Department of Human Services, their local Area Agency on Aging, the Senior Health Insurance Information Program, and the agencies listed in Appendix 1. The desk top will also have a menu of services that will directly connect users with the appropriate service provider or provide the information needed to obtain the service.

The one-button access to human services web sites provided by this project will greatly enhance the functional access of seniors to the services they need. By spreading an array of services before users in the form of desk top icons and a menu of services, their awareness of available services will dramatically increase. In addition, the one-button access to service providers through the desk top icons will make the services easily accessible and will eliminate the need to go through multiple web sites to obtain critical services. Providing Internet access at the senior centers will also give older people a comfortable and familiar place to learn and improve their computer skills, while being taught by someone who is interested in helping them.

The success of this project will be measured by specific outcomes to determine whether Internet access has in fact enhanced the access of older Iowans to the services they need. The beneficial outcomes that seniors will receive through the ISCIAN include receiving legal assistance from LSCI's Legal Hotline for Older Iowans. The legal assistance will help prevent older Iowans from losing their homes, experiencing mistreatment at care facilities, becoming victims of elder abuse, losing public benefits, and losing income due to consumer fraud. Through education and self-advocacy materials, older Iowans will become

informed of their legal rights and responsibilities and be better prepared to deal with government agencies, nursing facilities, landlords, guardians, and perpetrators of consumer fraud. The assistance that LSCI will offer through the ISCIAN will often prove to be a critical factor in seniors' abilities to maintain their homes and independence. The one-button Internet access will also enable seniors to obtain critical services and important information from other service providers, many of which provide online access to applications for services. Specific anticipated outcomes for the project are listed in Appendix 2.

In addition to enhancing users' access to services and information, the ISCIAN will provide other important benefits. In many rural and low-income communities, the senior center has become the main social gathering place for older residents. Internet access will help people build new economic and social relationships. The Internet access will also allow seniors to send and receive e-mail so that they can communicate with children, relatives, and friends throughout the world, thereby increasing their contacts with others without the necessity of long-distance telephone charges which many of them cannot afford. It will also increase community engagement by giving older Iowans direct access to city, county and state officials and enrich seniors by providing access to cultural events and other resources.

INNOVATION

The Iowa Senior Citizens Internet Access Project will represent the first major technological collaboration between the Legal Services community in Iowa and the agencies that are at the forefront of serving the state's growing elderly population. While the specific technology that will be used in this project is not cutting edge, providing an underserved, elderly population the means to use the Internet to more efficiently and effectively obtain services is ground breaking and innovative. This project will provide valuable information and experience for the agencies involved on the techniques of providing technology training and access to the fastest growing arena of information and commerce in our society.

This project will greatly enhance the functional access of seniors to human services web sites and available services. Although many of the web sites have links to the other organizations, most end users do not know about the web sites, or do not have computers to access them. Telephones do not always provide a viable option to access services because many seniors do not know that appropriate services exist. This project will place services in front of users though the use of desk top icons and a desk top menu of services, which will dramatically increase users' awareness of services that can benefit them, while making the services easily accessible. Users will not need to contend with busy signals, complicated voice-mail menus, or having to access services through one or more web sites. This one-button access will make existing and future web sites and services much more accessible to Iowa's senior citizens.

This project will employ persons with backgrounds in training and curriculum design to facilitate the important training function of the project. The staff will provide specialized training that will focus on developing skills that can be used to expand the use of technological resources. The project's staff will be the first in Iowa whose primary goal is to begin the process of addressing the technology barriers faced by older Iowans. They will be trained on the best methods of teaching elderly people who are computer illiterate. The staff will know how to recognize a prospective user's reluctance to learn a new skill and will work patiently and slowly to gain the users' interest, trust and support. The project staff, along with staff and volunteers at the senior centers, will provide the training and back-up needed to make access to the

Internet a reality for older Iowans.

LSCI currently has a grant from the national Legal Services Corporation to create a technology partnership between all of Iowa's Legal Services programs. This project is supporting current efforts to design and implement a web site targeted to low-income Iowans and attorneys participating in pro bono projects. The proposed ISCIAN will allow the Iowa Legal Aid Web Site (ILAW) to be the link for services between Iowa's senior centers and LSCI and its Legal Hotline for Older Iowans. In addition, the LSC-funded project supports a full time Technology Advocate whose work will complement the efforts contemplated by this project.

This Project will allow LSCI to transfer in an electronic format a wide array of community legal education materials that have been a part of LSCI's long-standing commitment to provide critical information to low-income and elderly people. Internet access will allow seniors to download legal educational materials from the Iowa Legal Aid Web Site. They will also be able to receive through e-mail legal educational materials or documents prepared specifically for them. A list of LSCI's community legal education materials is contained in Appendix 3.

DIFFUSION POTENTIAL

This project will be highly amenable to replication since existing off-the-shelf products and readily available hardware and software will be used for most of the technical aspects of the project. The process of developing the project will be well-documented and will be actively shared with other organizations wishing to learn from our experience.

This project will also have important ramifications for the access of the elderly to senior legal hotlines, to legal services programs, and to other human services agencies throughout the country. Most hotlines and legal services programs receive the vast majority of their clients either through referrals from service providers or from being listed in telephone books. This project will demonstrate that providing Internet access in a senior center, with the availability of direct access to a senior legal hotline or legal services program, is a more effective and efficient way to provide access to services. Legal services programs throughout the country will be able to replicate similar technological innovations, not only at senior centers, but at libraries, courthouses, schools, social service agencies, and other places that serve low-income or elderly people.

LSCI and the Iowa Association of Senior Centers will actively share information about the project, both when it is initially implemented and after it has been in operation for a period of time. LSCI will make presentations at professional conferences involving other legal services programs including the annual conference of the National Legal Aid and Defender Association. The Iowa Association of Senior Centers will make presentations at professional conferences, including the Governor's Conference on Aging. Information and outcomes of the project will also be described in professional journals such as the Management Information Exchange, which is widely read by Legal Services managers nationally. In addition, LSCI's new web site will post information describing the project and providing ongoing information about its progress and development. Information about the project will also be provided to the national Legal Services Corporation, the Iowa Department of Elder Affairs, all of Iowa's Area Agencies

on Aging, the U.S. Administration on Aging, and to the other twenty statewide senior legal hotlines. LSCI and the IASC will also provide information about the project to other organizations that might wish to develop similar projects.

PROJECT FEASIBILITY

The centerpiece for this project is the creation of easily accessible desk top Internet connections in one hundred senior centers located in rural, low-income and minority communities in Iowa. The workstations will consist of the best priced, latest generation computers purchased following competitive bidding among major vendors. Each workstation will include a computer, 17" color monitor, modem connection, and a combination laser printer/fax machine. Software will consist of a standard operating system, word processing program and an Internet browser. Each desk top will also be loaded with a program such as PC Anywhere to allow for remote troubleshooting and maintenance. The system will be configured as simply as possible so that users will be able to connect to elder services web sites in a fast and convenient manner by clicking on desk top icons or on a desk top menu of services. Project staff will survey prospective end users at each center to determine their needs and the desk top icons will be modified to meet the identified needs. The project will use the existing infrastructure of commercially-available telecommunications services for Internet access. Additional information related to the technological aspects of this project is contained in the Budget Narrative.

At the initial stages of the project, staff will research available resources about Internet training and address basic access issues by contacting gerontologists and other professionals who can provide direction in developing appropriate training and instructional materials for the elderly population served by this project. The staff will determine what assistive devices and programs are available for disabled individuals and for non-English speaking persons. This project will develop a tutorial designed for senior citizens that will show users how to effectively use the computer and the Internet. The tutorial is described in the Budget Narrative. The project staff, working with LSCI's Public Information Coordinator, will also produce and distribute the Iowa Elderly Resident's Guide to the Internet, which will inform elderly people how to effectively use the Internet as a tool for education, communication, and access to available services and resources.

The 85 senior centers participating in the project will be selected on the basis of competitive applications. The application process will evaluate the centers in terms of need, interest, and ability to support the project locally. The support required of the centers will include access to a telephone line to connect to the Internet, and a secure and accessible space for the equipment. Each center will provide volunteers or staff who can be trained to serve as local Internet instructors for seniors for at least eight hours per month. The centers will also be required to submit a plan to continue the Internet access to services after the end of the project. Appendix 4 is a list of some of the criteria to be used to select appropriate sites for this project.

Staffing for the project will consist of a Project Coordinator, a Technology Advocate and one half-time support staff employee. Additional staff resources will be provided by LSCI management staff, who will provide administrative and supervisory support; staff of the Iowa Association of Senior Centers who will provide administrative support; and volunteer and staff trainers at the 85 senior centers. The Project

Coordinator will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the project in all respects and will work with LSCI's Program Administrator in soliciting and evaluating bids and quotes for equipment, software and services. The Project Coordinator will also be primarily responsible for the design and implementation of the project's training component. The Technology Advocate will be primarily responsible for the installation of equipment and ongoing technical support of the 100 workstations and Internet connections. The support staff employee will provide clerical, receptionist and administrative support for the project. All staff will be involved with collecting data and information needed for ongoing evaluation of the project.

LSCI and its project partners are uniquely qualified to implement the project. LSCI has been the main provider of free legal assistance to low-income and older Iowans for the past 24 years, while the Iowa Association of Senior Centers, the Area Agencies on Aging, and the various senior centers that will participate in this project were specifically established to provide services to older Iowans. All of the organizations are familiar with the barriers to access to services that confront older Iowans. They also are familiar with the special needs of this underserved community and know how to best provide the services in a manner which is both understandable and effective. Additional background information about LSCI and how this Project will facilitate the provision of services to seniors by LSCI's Legal Hotline for Older Iowans is contained in Appendix 5. The budget for this project is set forth in detail in the budget narrative portion of this application.

At the conclusion of the project period, it is anticipated that the senior centers and their clients will have come to rely on the computers to such an extent that they will deem them to be an essential service and that they will be able to raise the minimal funds that will be necessary to continue the maintenance and operation of the Internet access in the future. If the senior centers agree to continue using the equipment for project purposes after the end of the project, ownership of the equipment will be transferred to them.

At this time, there is no plan for upgrading the technology after it is initially installed. It is expected that one computer in each senior center will be sufficient to accommodate the demand for services at most centers, especially in the rural areas. Since this is a fairly simple project design, the system can accommodate significant growth to allow additional end users to be served without the need for a redesign.

The privacy of the end users of this project is of concern since they will be using the equipment to convey and receive personal information. LSCI will require the senior centers to follow procedures designed to protect confidential information. Users and senior center staff will be trained about privacy concerns and will be able to distinguish between secure and non-secure sites. Information provided to LSCI and its Legal Hotline will be protected through its secure web site.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The applicant for these funds, the Legal Services Corporation of Iowa (LSCI), is the largest provider of civil legal services to low-income Iowans, providing services to clients in 98 of Iowa's 99 counties through ten regional offices. LSCI is also the largest provider of free legal assistance to older Iowans providing services in all 99 counties through contracts with twelve area agencies on aging and a grant from the U. S. Administration on Aging. LSCI reviewed this project with the Advisory Council of LSCI's Legal

Hotline for Older Iowans. The Advisory Council membership list is attached as Appendix 6. The Advisory Council, which represents a broad cross-section of client eligible people and service providers to older Iowans, believed that this project will have a significant impact in rural Iowa by enabling older people to obtain the services they need, helping both them and their communities. Appendices 10-13 are letters of support for this project from the Iowa Department of Elder Affairs, the Iowa Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and some of the area agencies on aging which are planning to participate in this project.

LSCI's partner in this application is the Iowa Association of Senior Centers. The Association was formed in 1997 to provide services and support to older people and senior centers. Its membership currently consists of 75 of Iowa's senior centers and it provides outreach and information to approximately 300 senior centers in Iowa. LSCI will also be working with the Iowa Department of Elder Affairs and Iowa's 13 area agencies on aging (AAA). The AAA's are private not-for-profit organizations authorized by the Older Americans Act to provide services to people who are age 60 or older. The AAA's operate or provide funding to most of the senior centers and meal sites in Iowa. The other partners in this project, which are too numerous to mention, will be the individual senior centers and mealsites that will be selected to participate in this project.

To investigate the feasibility of this project, the Iowa Association of Senior Centers conducted a telephone survey of senior centers. The survey showed that very few of the senior centers contacted had Internet access for its clients, and that Internet access was virtually nonexistent in their respective communities. The staff of the senior centers indicated a great interest in this project and also expressed a willingness to donate the facilities, telephone access, staff and volunteers needed to make the project a success. The Association also conducted focus groups of seniors to determine interest in this project. The focus groups showed little experience, but high interest, in using computers and the Internet to access services and for communication with family and friends. A summary of the survey and focus groups is attached as Appendix 14.

To ensure that the community of older Iowans becomes involved in the project, staff will work with the senior centers to ensure that all people who regularly use the senior center know about the project and the services and benefits it will provide to them. The project will establish an Advisory Council composed of client-eligible people, senior center staff, and other service providers to provide ongoing input about the project and how it should be implemented and modified to ensure that it provides the greatest benefits to the end users. The Project's staff will conduct initial training workshops around the state at the time the Internet connection is installed for the staff and volunteers of the senior centers selected for the project. These trainings will be designed to orient them to the new technology and to provide them with knowledge they will use to provide instruction to end users. Project staff will also provide initial and periodic trainings to end users to ensure that they know how to effectively use the computers and the Internet. Project staff will be available for ongoing technical support to both the end users and the senior center trainers.

EVALUATION AND DOCUMENTATION

This project will best be evaluated by an assessment of whether final outcomes meet the project's goals and objectives. An independent third-party evaluator will be hired to assess the project. The evaluator's role will begin when the project is first being implemented to ensure that systems are designed that will

include mechanisms for gathering data and information to assess measurable objectives. The evaluator will also help design surveys and evaluation forms that will be completed at appropriate times by senior center staff and the end users to provide information essential to ensuring that the purposes of the project are fulfilled. The anticipated outcomes for the project and the project time line are attached as Appendices 2 and 15. These will be subject to revision after consultation with the project evaluator, who will also prepare an evaluation report at the end of the project. Appendix 16 includes information regarding Dr. Edward Saunders, a Professor of Social Work at the University of Iowa, who has studied and developed measurement tools for human services projects, and who is anticipated to be the project evaluator.

Evaluation questions will include whether the project increased the access of older Iowans to critical services, what factors contributed to the success of the project at certain senior centers and the lack of success at other centers, whether barriers to access continued after implementation of the project, how each component of the project functioned to provide the services anticipated, whether the training was successful in teaching users how to use the Internet, whether users utilized the Internet access for purposes such as e-mail and research, and whether the project contributed to the social interaction, community involvement and cultural enrichment of the end users.

The independent third-party evaluator and the project staff will conduct initial surveys at the senior centers at the time the project is initially implemented, again at the end of the first year of operation, and finally at the end of the project. Surveys will include the senior center staff and the users of the technology, with the initial surveys being used to collect baseline data. Since much of the data to be collected will involve written surveys at multiple sites throughout the state, many of the surveys will be distributed and explained by the project's staff who will provide the data to the independent third-party evaluator. The data will then be compiled and analyzed by the evaluator to provide interim and final reports so that LSCI, its partners and NTIA will have the appropriate information to gauge the success of the project and to determine the feasibility of continuing service after the project ends.

In addition to user surveys, the project will be designed to track certain information that will allow an evaluation of whether the Internet access has produced increased access to services. Specifically, information will be tracked using the following methods:

1. LSCI's Legal Hotline for Older Iowans' case management system will track information about the number of older Iowans who use the Internet to contact the Hotline for legal assistance and the results of that assistance.

2. Each computer will generate a pop-up survey that will ask simple questions designed to elicit opinions about the users' impressions of the value of the Internet access.

The project evaluation methods will be used by the project staff, along with other information obtained from end users, senior centers and others, to continuously evaluate, plan, review and revise the implementation of the project to ensure that the project successfully fulfills its purpose of using the Internet to increase the access of older Iowans to critical services.